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French instruction in botany

BONNIER and SABLON² have published the first volume of a text-book of botany for the use of classes in universities, and in schools of medicine, pharmacy, and agriculture. The first impression is that of great bulk, and it is almost beyond belief that such an amount of material can be absorbed by undergraduate students in a continuous course. The authors, however, are teachers of large experience, and must know what the French situation demands and how much the French student can endure. The illustrations are for the most part excellent, and are said to be published in this volume for the first time. This means a large stock of new illustrations of well-known structures; and this stock really constitutes the chief contribution of the volume.

The text is clear and well organized; and the distinct paragraphing is all that could be desired in a text for elementary students. The material is brought together from every direction, making the volume a compendium of information concerning the topics presented. However, it gives an impression of voluminousness and diffuseness rather than of logical and compact presentation.

The four parts of this first volume are very unequal. The first part (138 pp.) consists of a general introduction, beginning with the characteristics of living things and gradually approaching plants. The second part (602 pp.) presents the morphology of angiosperms, under the following topics: leaf, stem, root, flower, and development. In this part the emphasis is laid upon anatomy and what one may call for convenience the older morphology.

The third part (524 pp.) deals with the families of angiosperms, that dreariest of all wastes for the elementary student, but perhaps demanded by the French schools. Just what is done with this part of European text-books has always been a mystery to the majority of American teachers. The fourth part (62 pp.) presents the gymnosperms and closes the volume.

A noticeable feature of the presentation is the singular blindness to published work. In an elementary text this seems natural, and usually would occasion no remark; but this large compendium cites literature, and further dignifies the citations by collecting them in a list at the end of each part. The four lists include 108 titles; and when they are examined, it is evident that the selection has been at random, without reference to the importance of the papers or to the representative character of the lists. In fact, the impression upon students and colleagues would be far better if no citations had been attempted.

Taking the book as fairly representative of botanical instruction in French schools, one may conclude that the instruction includes more of the old botany than the new; presents a mass of details rather than general organizing ideas; and calls for diligence and a good memory rather than for initiative.—J. M. C.

² BONNIER, GASTON, et SABLON, LECLERC DU, Cours de botanique. I. Phanérogames. 8vo. pp. iv + 1328. *figs.* 2389. Paris: Librairie générale de l'enseignement. 1905.